

FLORENCE
BARDSLEY'S
STORY ·
EUGENE
FIELD ·



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FLORENCE BARDSLEY'S STORY

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MISS BARDSLEY, AGE 19.

FLORENCE BARDSLEY'S STORY

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF A
REMARKABLE WOMAN

BY

EUGENE FIELD



CHICAGO
W. IRVING WAY
1897

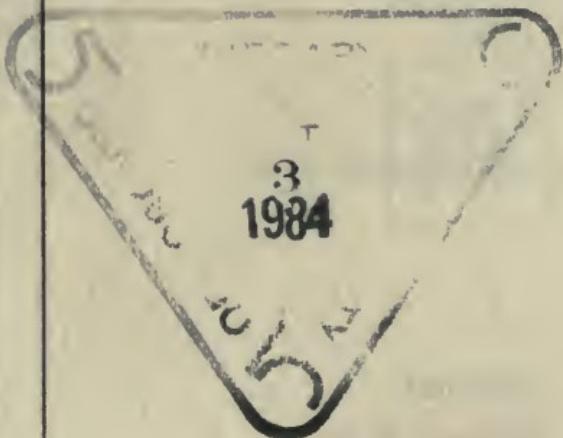
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NOTE.



N the Summer of 1892 the late Mr. Eugene Field was asked by the Editor of a magazine of bookish character to write an article for his Christmas number,—something in the nature of a review. Mr. Field answered that he doubted if he could produce anything satisfactory, as he had never written a serious review of a real book, but if the editor would like a skit on a mythical book he could perhaps give him something that might serve. The editor replied that

this was precisely what he wanted. Mr. Field therefore set to work with a confidence born of the success of a former effort in the same line, which was printed in his own paper at the expense of a local publishing house, and which, by the way, was productive of much amusement to himself and confusion to the publishers alluded to. The review of the mythical book was duly submitted to the editor of the magazine, but after a proper lapse of time was returned to Mr. Field—not, however, with the usual declined-with-thanks letter, but with one of praise, and an expression of regret that the review was so good as, if used, to subject his maga-

zine and its publishers to expense and annoyance from would-be purchasers of the book reviewed. However, Mr. Field was at liberty to make use of the article wheresoever he chose, and an honorarium would be sent him the same as if the article had been used in the periodical for which it was written.

In due time it was printed, and lost, on one of the pages of the "Morning News" where readers were not accustomed to seek his "Sharps and Flats," and from which it is now recaptured by the kind permission of those concerned.

It seems unnecessary to indicate the source of the portraits.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

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Antennae

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FLORENCE BARDSLEY'S STORY

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Florence Bardsley's Story.



THE LIFE AND DEATH OF A REMARKABLE WOMAN.



LTHOUGH there is no positive—by which we mean authoritative—assurance to that effect, it seems probable that in the research and study involved by his exploitation of the Talleyrand memoirs, Mr. White-law Reid became interested in the remarkable character

Un Aperçu de la Vie de Mme. la Comtesse de la Tour. Par WHITELAW REID, Ministre plénipotentiaire et Envoyé extraordinaire des Etats-Unis. Bouchet et Fils, Paris.

and quite as remarkable career of Mme. la Comtesse de la Tour.¹ The history of that singular genius was such as would naturally appeal for admiration and sympathy to one of so romantic and so gracious a disposition as the famous journalist-diplomate ; yet what causes soever may have led to the work, the work is here before us, complete in its elaboration, exactness, delicacy, humor, and tenderness—as charming a monograph as ever has fallen to our lot for perusal and exploitation.

This *Un Aperçu de la Vie de Mme. la Comtesse de la Tour* is, we understand, the first performance attempted

by Mr. Reid in the French ; therefore is it notable not more as a critical essay upon a character of singular ingenuity than as the maiden effort of an enterprising and conscientious scholar in a foreign language. It shall never cease — we make the humiliating confession at once — it shall never cease to be the cause of deep and poignant regret to us that we are unable to detect and to analyze that subtle vein of sportive satire (*cette veine subtile de satire enjouée*) which, according to *La Revue des Beaux-Arts*, winds its graceful way through this fascinating brochure ; our acquaintance with the French is, alas ! not suffi-

ciently nice to admit of our appreciation of the delicacies of Gallic synonym, allusion, and conceit ; the subtleties in which, according to the Parisian reviewers, this little book abounds are beyond our comprehension. In short, we find ourselves in a condition of which the old Canterbury bard has said :

What playne tale ben tollen full faire
yt is to knowe,
But soothly speeche yn craftie wise
menne reden not soe.

It is our good old friend Dr. I. Watts who has remarked, — albeit we do not find the verses in Mr. Bartlett's

new and enlarged edition of
Familiar Quotations,

Artless communications bring
A fund of pure delight,
Whilst every dark, ambiguous thing
In speech is out of sight.

But let us not repine. Our task is before us. 'Ο φεύγων μόλον ἄλφιτα φεύγει—*buona incudine non teme martello—qui molam fugit farinam non invenit.*

The woman whose career Mr. Reid has so ingeniously reviewed was of English birth and parentage ; her father was Sir Robert Bardsley, a physician of standing, and her mother was a Devonshire lady, a daughter of Sir Archibald Crampton, sometime secre-

tary to the famous Indian potentate, Bengali Suhamazi, the maharajah of Tingapoo. Of this most excellent couple Florence Bardsley (born in 1786) was the second child and only daughter. At an early age, almost in infancy, she exhibited that bent of character which in subsequent years made her the most conspicuous of her sex. She was but four when, as her biographer asserts, she composed certain "Lines to my Friend, Ralph Armstrong," the burden of this little poem being a regret that Ralph was a boy instead of a girl. Presumably the sentiments of this lyric did not appeal to the youth ; at any rate, when the children

met again Ralph chastised the infantile poetess (*châtaie l'enfant poète*), an action that tended to confirm the latter's opinion of the vanity of the estate of masculinity. From this curious beginning Florence went through life declaring and exploiting those advantages which seemed to her to accrue from being a woman, which advantages, she maintained (and most truly and righteously, we think), did so vastly outnumber those of masculinity that she accounted as veritably fortunate those only that were, by Heaven's grace, of the feminine persuasion. Declining with a fine scorn the services of a tutor, this remarkable girl

pursued her studies under the direction of a governess, exhibiting a special fondness for literature, composition, history, and apologetics. It is said, though Mr. Reid does not appear to credit the tradition, that for several years the famous Mme. de Genlis was her instructor in French and Italian and upon the harpsichord. But Mr. Reid does give in his appendix a letter from Mme. de Genlis to Mme. D'Arblay, wherein the former speaks of Florence as the most precocious creature (*la créature la plus précoce*) she has ever met with. The comtesse herself used to say that, as a child, her amusements and avocations were peculiarly

feminine ; she had a dislike for horses and fox-terriers ; she never went to the hunt, nor would she learn to swim, for these things were, as she contended, incompatible with the dignity and delicacy of a woman. Her only pet, as we are told, was a beautiful French poodle, which accompanied her everywhere, until finally it expired of fright during a thunder-storm of unusual violence (*il expira de frayeur pendant un orage d'une violence inusitée*).

It was when she was just turned of seventeen that Miss Bardsley contributed to the *London Review* a series of five articles upon "The Disadvantages of Being a Man." These

papers, published anonymously, created a mighty stir, and speculation as to the identity of the author was rife. The precious secret was not disclosed, however, until after the publication of the young woman's second essay and first brochure, which was entitled, "The Horrors of Shaving Categorically Set Forth as Showing How Evil a Necessity it is to be a Man." Leigh Hunt seems to have been the first to ferret out the authorship of these curious works. At any rate, it was Leigh Hunt who gave Florence Bardsley's name to the public in a masterly criticism that evinced clearly enough Hunt's sympathy

with the young woman's utterances. Immediately there was a great tempest. Women in all parts of the United Kingdom cried out against the startling heresies promulgated by this erratic girl. The newspapers were burdened with letters expostulating against the new and vicious doctrine. The crusade was intemperate to the degree of absurdity. Even Mrs. Piozzi¹ took her pen in hand to launch Johnsonian invective against the "temerarious schismatic" and her "pernicious fripperies!" In short, the ladies made so furious an onslaught that our young philosopher felt compelled to defend herself; and this she

Diary and Correspondence,
London, 1854,
Vol. ii, p. 39.

did in the ablest manner (as Mr. Reid avers and as we are prepared to believe), in a pamphlet entitled *The Pains and Cares of Masculinity*. This book met with an enormous sale, passing into fourteen editions, and being translated into half a dozen foreign tongues. Wolfgang Goethe used to say it was the most remarkable book he had read. When Walter Savage Landor went to the war in Spain this was the one volume he took with him. Southey praised it without stint ; and good old Wordsworth pronounced it a “ sweet, sweet solace.” Nathelless it made no converts among womankind. It sealed Florence Bardsley’s doom

with her own sex ; for 't was only with horror that that sex could be brought to contemplate the heresy which held the estate of woman to be preferable to the estate of man.

However unpopular Florence became with woman-kind, she was universally admired of men, not only on account of her singular personal beauty and her intellectual charms, but also through those sentiments of gratitude which every intelligent male experienced upon contemplating what heroic service this fair reformer strove to do in behalf of his sex. Times were then so very different from now. "Woman," says Mr. Reid, "had for centuries

been down-trodden, and her intellect was but half developed. She saw dimly, and by erratic mental processes she magnified to a preposterous degree what she saw. She wailed a melancholy song, of which the burden was man's inhumanity and woman's woe, man's injustice and woman's martyrdom."

"Heaven," cried Mrs. Hemans, "is that blissful future life where we shall be rewarded and men shall be punished; for in heaven women shall be changed into men, and men into women!" Hence hath arisen that saying which the Dutch have:

"Men komt niet lachende in den Hemel!"

"It is hard," remarks Mr. Reid parenthetically—"it is hard to understand now the situation as it existed eighty years ago, times have so changed. This fair young creature, Florence Bardsley, said 'nay' to every feminine tradition; she was an iconoclast that went about rending the beliefs and creeds and dogmas of her sex: 'we are to be envied,' 'we alone enjoy freedom and liberty,' 'we govern the world,' 'man is weak, woman is strong,'—this was her new, her amazing gospel. But," and here Mr. Reid significantly quotes the good old Danish proverb: "*'Anden Tid giver andet Folk.'*" And then does her

biographer, seemingly borne away by enthusiasm, interrupt the thread of his narrative to commend, in terms of exalted eloquence, the unparalleled valor of this unapproachable woman. Yet no encomium does he utter which we shall not sturdily defend in case the righteousness of his declaration be impeached; for we know full well that it must be a proper cause, else would he not espouse it; moreover do we continually thank God that at an early age this solemn truth was inculcated — viz., that men owed their fellow-men no sterner or sweeter duty than that of standing by one another. Yet shall it always be

a cause of grief to us, and we make great moan, that it is wholly beyond our capability to provide you, gentle reader, with an Englished specimen of this eloquence whereof we speak, for these are potent words he has to say—words not only extolling Florence Bardsley to the skies, but also incontinently exonerating our masculine sex from that Ossa-upon-Pelion of opprobrium which femininity hath piled upon it.

Miss Bardsley's first marriage was with Clarence Sidney Eastcourt, the son of a manufacturer at Manchester. The union, altogether felicitous, was short-lived, for Mr. Eastcourt soon died of a quinsy

contracted from exposure at tennis, a vice to which he was violently addicted (*absolument esclave*), and at which he exhibited marvelous agility. Two years later—we move rapidly with our narrative, for we cannot with pleasure contemplate the anguish of the bereaved bride during this melancholy season—two years later, while traveling in Italy, the young widow met with the Comte de la Tour, a Parisian of wealth and culture; a few months later she entered into a matrimonial alliance with him, and thereafter her home was, of course, in France, the comte's estates lying in the environs of the capital city of that empire.



MISS BARDSLEY, AGE 45.

Although her senior by many years, the Comte de la Tour was in complete sympathy (*en pleine sympathie*) with his wife's extraordinary views, and he encouraged her continually to the prosecution of her mission. The consequence was that, during the twenty years subsequent to her second marriage, Florence wrote and published no fewer than sixty pamphlets in advocacy of her curious heresies. During this period she was regarded as the most famous literary woman in Europe ; her society was courted of the noblest intellects ; sages, warriors, philosophers, poets, authors, artists, the clergy — all the shining lights in the

¹ *Odes et Poésies Diverses.* Paris (Levy), 1876.

² *Lyrisches Intermezzo, Sämtliche Poetische Werke.* 3 Aufl 4 Bände, Hamburg (Hoffmann), 1873.

³ *Autobiographie Gesammelte Werke, vierte Auflage.* Bd. IV, Leipzig (Reissner), 1873, p. 106.

realms of thought and of endeavor were attracted to her salons. "She is the apotheosis of feminine beauty and valor," wrote Victor Hugo.¹ Heine spoke of her as "that wingless angel,"² and that bearish old bachelor, Schopenhauer, declared³ that she was the only woman that had ever awakened a tender sentiment in his bosom. It was to Schopenhauer, by the way, that she dedicated her thoughtful and charming treatise on the miseries of wearing suspenders (*Les Misères qui Résultent de ce que les Hommes Portent des Bretelles*), of which we should like to give the title, but for the circumstance that in English it

does not sound half so dignified as in the original.

In the autumn of 1843, the comtesse was challenged to public debate by Frau Kathrina Winkelmann, a Hanoverian, who had previously published a book against the comtesse's "abominable creed and school of thought." The debate was had at Brussels in the famous Salle de la Concorde of the royal armory, and lasted two days, vast crowds assembling from all over Europe. The women applauded Frau Winkelmann to the echo, while the men as rapturously indorsed the comtesse's utterances. The debate would doubtless have extended over a longer period

but for the excitement occasioned by an exceptionally bitter tilt between the champions near the close of the second day's engagement. Exasperated by some ingenious repartee, Frau Winkelmann indignantly declared (we now quote from the official records, *id est dicere*, p. 583 *et seq.*) : “If I could be a man for twenty-four hours, the first thing I should do would be to go down town and make a night of it with the boys.” (*Si je pouvais être homme pendant vingt-quatre heures, la première chose que je ferais ce serait de descendre en ville pour faire la noce avec mes joyeux camarades.*)



FRAU WINKELMANN.

"Nay," retorted the comtesse, "I should rather spend that time upon my knees imploring Heaven's benignant offices to restore me once again and forever to womanhood, an estate free from the weaknesses, the temptations, the appetites, and the evils that beset all men!"

Ensaboar a cabeça do asno, perda do sabao. This last audacious declaration ended the controversy at once; the storm that had been gathering for forty-eight awful hours now burst forth in all its fury. *Mei berrache bat leine Orenzen!* Waving their parasols and umbrellas in threatening wise, the multitude of women¹ made a rush for the

¹ M. Thiers asserts that "the women folks packed the convention."—*Les femmes dominerent à la séance du congrès.* (*Oeuvres*, Tome xi., p. 216.

platform, determined to chastise the comtesse for her temerity. "*Do fuerza viene, derecho se pierde,*" as we Castilians say. The unhappy lady sought refuge in flight; that night she made her way secretly to the frontier, and so duly effected her escape into France. This incident gave rise to the popular phrase, "Between Two Days," which the French have politely corrupted into *entre nous*.²

¹ Bartlett's
Popular Quotations,
ninth edition,
Appendix.

The Comte de la Tour died in 1848; he bequeathed his enormous wealth to his widow, who for many years maintained an academy for the dissemination of her philosophy. This institution

failed of its purposes, however, for the reason that no woman would patronize it; the attendance of boys and young men was enormous, but the attendance of girls was nil. "So hard is it," cries biographer Reid, and we echo his passionate cry—"so hard is it to combat bigotry and to assuage prejudice in womankind!"

At last, after a life of singular sweetness and piety, and after a career of earnest endeavor, the end came. In the ninety-second year of her age this marvelous woman passed away. The end was in perfect keeping with what had gone before. Perceiving that—but no! 't were folly for us

to undertake, in our confessed feebleness, to tell the story of the pathetic last scene of all. Mr. Reid's narrative of this climax is so strong in its simplicity, tenderness, and fidelity that we choose to quote it in its concinnate Gallic entirety:

“Voyant que sa fin était proche, la comtesse fit mander son confesseur. Le saint homme se rendit sur le champ à son appel. Il fut surpris et peiné de trouver sa vénérable pénitente aussi changée. La mort l'avait déjà marquée de son doigt.

“‘Je vous ai envoyé chercher en toute hâte, mon père,’ dit-elle, ‘car mon âme est



MISS BARDSLEY, AGE 80.

obsédée de choses que je voudrais vous avouer.'

"Le Père Michel sourit tristement.

"'Ah, mon enfant,' dit-il tendrement, 'de quoi votre pauvre âme a-t-elle à se confesser? Votre vie n'a-t-elle pas été un modèle? N'a-t-elle pas abondé en œuvres pieuses témoignant d'une façon remarquable des vertus de chasteté, zèle religieux, charité, force d'âme chrétienne, tolérance, patience, et humilité?'

"'Hélas,' soupira la mourante, "le peu de bien que j'ai fait a été obscurci et amoindri par un péché vraiment grave, un péché qui n'a pas été accidentel, mais qui a duré pendant nombre d'années, ainsi

que vous allez l'apprendre, car je ne puis dire adieu à ce monde sans m'en être pleinement confessé à vous. Et je vous adjure par tout ce qu'il y a de plus sacré, mon père, de faire connaître au monde, une fois que je serai morte, ce que je suis sur le point de vous révéler en confession, car ainsi seulement sera-t-il possible de reparer en quelque sorte le mal que mes conseils et mes actions ont causé.'

"C'est en ces termes que la comtesse prépara le Père Michel à entendre sa déclaration de mourante, à savoir que sa vie entière avait été une tromperie calculée; qu'en tout temps elle n'avait cessé de regretter d'être femme et

qu'elle avait toujours désiré être homme, l'état de l'homme lui semblant être sous tous les rapports préférable à celui de la femme. Il paraîtrait, d'après ces dernières paroles, que dès son enfance même elle était devenue la proie de ce mécontentement rongeur avec lequel les femmes ont l'habitude de contempler leur propre condition, et de cette envie curieuse avec laquelle elles envisagent les avantages qu'elles s'imaginent être l'attribut de l'autre sexe. Elle avait donc été poussée vers une carrière de déception par un certain faux et mauvais orgueil qui lui avait procuré un état de contentement dont elle n'avait

jamais réellement joui, et lui avait fait proclamer une apostasie qui de fait n'avait jamais existé.

“ ‘Voyez en moi,’ dit la mourante, ‘la plus malheureuse des créatures humaines — sous tous les rapports et en tout sens une femme — une femme imbue de tous ces préjugés intuitifs, jalousies, envies, et mécontentements particuliers à mon sexe, mais néanmoins rebelle à ces sentiments et cherchant à les masquer. Je vous adjure, mon père, de proclamer hautement ce fait au monde, que celle qui désire mourir en paix doit vivre dans la pratique ouverte et avouer des faiblesses de son sexe.’

“Après la mort de cette femme extraordinaire, un papier, écrit de sa main, revêtu de sa signature et scellé de son sceau, fut découvert. Ce document portait qu'une somme de 30,000 francs serait consacrée à former un capital dont les intérêts annuels seraient payés à la jeune fille, française ou étrangère, qui, arborant courageusement le costume distinctivement masculin, montrerait dans un manège de Paris le plus d'habileté à enfourcher un cheval à la façon des hommes.”



TRANSLATION.

PERCEIVING that her end was near at hand, the countess sent for her father confessor. That holy man, presenting himself forthwith, was amazed and grief-stricken to find his venerable charge so sadly changed in appearance. The hand of death was already upon her.

"I have sent for you in haste, holy father," quoth she, "for I have much upon my soul which I would fain unburthen unto you."

Pere Michel smiled sadly.
"Ab, my child," said he, tenderly, "what can your

pure soul have to shrieve itself of? Has not your life been a shining example; has it not abounded in pious deeds wherein have been set forth and conspicuously illustrated the virtues of chastity, religious zeal, charity, fortitude, forbearance, patience, and humility?"

"Alas," moaned the expiring woman, "the little good that I have done is beclouded and outweighed by a most grievous sin, which has been the wrong-doing not of a season but of many years' continuance, as you shall bear, for I cannot bid farewell to earthly scenes before I have freely acknowledged my guilt to you. And by every sacred consider-

ation do I enjoin upon you, boly father, to declare unto the world after I am gone hence such things as I shall now confess, for thereby alone is it possible to undo somewhat of the evil that my counsels and my practices have done."

With this preliminary did the countess prepare Père Michel for her dying declaration, which was in effect that her whole life had been a studied deception; that at no time thereof had she ceased to regret that she was a woman, nor ceased to wish that she was a man, the estate of the male seeming unto her to be incomparably preferable to that of the female. From these last words of hers it appeared

that even in her childhood had she become possessed of that gnawing discontent with which womankind are wont to contemplate their own condition, and of that curious envy with which they contemplate the fancied advantages of the other sex; yet to a career of deception had she been impelled by a certain false and wicked pride that asserted a contention she never actually experienced, and proclaimed an apostasy which in fact never existed.

"Behold in me," quoth the dying countess, "the most wretched of human beings—a woman in every particular and sense a woman—one deeply imbued with all those

instinctive prejudices, jealousies, envies, and discontents peculiar to my sex, yet a traitor thereunto and a dissembler thereof. I conjure you, holy father, to blazon this truth unto the world: that she who would die in peace must live in the confessed and open practice of the frailties of her sex."

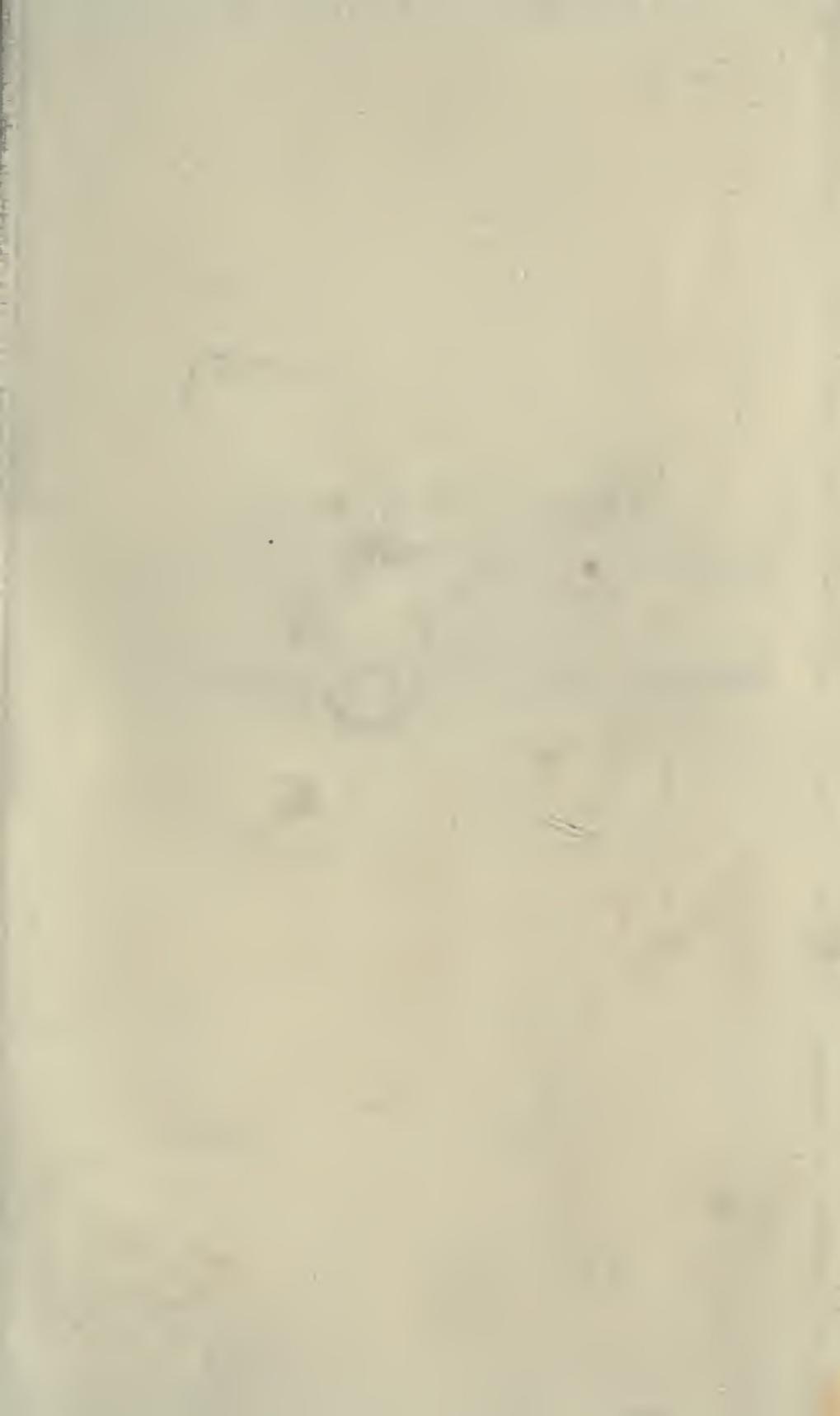
After the demise of this remarkable woman, a paper written in her own hand, and signed and sealed, was found, expressing her last wish, which was that the sum of 30,000 francs should be appropriated out of her fortune to the establishment of a fund whereof the annual interest should be paid as a prize to the girl, native or foreign, who, clad

*in bifurcated nether garments,
should exhibit in the Paris
school of horsemanship the
greatest proficiency in the art
of riding a horse man-fashion.*





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